

BOOKS NOVEMBER 19, 2015

Axelrod, Snyder talk politics and poems at Book Fair

HIGHLIGHTS

Axelrod pleased to be in “land of aspiring presidents”

Snyder discusses living off the grid



BY CONNIE OGLE
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Politics and poetry collided Thursday night at Miami Book Fair — well, OK, they didn't collide so much as co-exist. Pulitzer Prize-winning Beat poet Gary Snyder and political strategist David Axelrod each appeared in Miami Dade College's Chapman Conference

Center, one discussing living off the grid, fiddling with generators and Allen Ginsberg and the other revisiting his political career working with a certain senator from Chicago of whom you might have heard (and for whom you might have voted).

Axelrod, who was in town to talk about his book *Believer: My Forty Years in Politics*, said he was happy to be at the fair, adding “I’m pleased to be here in the land of aspiring presidents.” He paced the stage, talking about a career in public life that was inevitable from the moment he sat atop a mailbox and watched a young John F. Kennedy speak to a crowd.

He knew then, he said, that politics was what he wanted to do. “Politics is the way we grab the wheel of history and steer it,” he explained.

But before he became Barack Obama’s chief campaign adviser, he worked as a reporter, a job that prepared him for what was to come: “Covering murder and mayhem prepared me for covering Chicago politics.”

Axelrod had only good things to say about the president for whom he worked and told stories about the campaign trail. There are two sorts of people who run for office, he said: “People who run for office because they want to be something, and people who run for office because they want to do something.” Not surprisingly, there is no doubt on which side he believes President Barack Obama falls.

Earlier in the evening, Snyder talked about living off the grid, which he has done for 47 years. If you’re inclined to follow his example, he has a suggestion: “If you can be on the grid, stay on it. It’s cheaper.” But he added, “There are lessons in solar panels and generators.”

Snyder read from his most recent collection, *This Present Moment*, which he calls a “break from his form of the past.” The poems were simple, amusing (one was entitled *Why I Take Good Care of My MacIntosh*).

Naturally, an audience member asked Snyder what he remembered about the night Allen Ginsberg read *Howl* for the first time. Snyder, who was also on the program, said he had read the poem in its early stages.

What did he think of it? “I thought, ‘How appropriate at this historical moment to be reading that,’ ” he said. “I thought, ‘This is going to be an influential poem.’ ”

FRIDAY AT THE FAIR

6 p.m.: “An Evening With the National Book Awards Winners and Finalists,” Chapman Conference Center, Miami Dade College, 300 NE Second Ave; \$15; www.miamibookfair.com

The Swamp: 6 p.m.: Miami Improv Showcase; 9 p.m.: Spam All-Stars



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